

My name is Melodie Brooks and I am the Director of the Mercy Memorial Rape Crisis Center and Child Advocacy Center in Monroe Michigan. I would like to thank Representative Kate Ebli and the committee for the opportunity to address a very serious matter.

I have spent my entire professional career, 25 years, caring for victims of crime as a forensic nurse and victim advocate. During this time, I have seen the struggles victims face as they attempt to deal with this devastating ordeal. In my practice, victims adhere to the fact that the legal system will protect them and justice will be rendered however, this scenario sometimes falls short of reality. Being sexually assaulted is a life-changing event, a process that hits an individual at the very core of their being; exacting enormous emotional and physical demands. The offender strips the sexual assault victim of their ability to maintain power and control and leaves them besieged to find ways to cope and continue.

Although I have lived in Monroe County for 30 years, my career started in Ohio, which unlike Michigan avails sexual assault victims the opportunity to obtain a temporary protection order (TPO). I was very surprised to learn Michigan law lacked this provision.

My purpose today is to request that victims be given a piece of hope, a light that gives them back that power and control that was taken from them. By changing the law allowing sexual assault victims to obtain a personal protection order, victims will have that hope. As a healthcare provider, I recognize that sometimes it is the smallest things that change people's lives and begin the process of healing.

I would like to share one story of a very courageous woman seen at our center after being sexually assaulted. She was young, hard working and had a small child, which she loved dearly. After several meetings at our center, follow up calls, counseling referrals and appointments we thought she was healing, however she lived in constant fear that her offender would attack her again. No matter where she went in the community she was afraid, work, home, school, or in the park with her daughter. Unlike large cities, Monroe is a small town and avoiding people is very difficult. Therefore, she attempted to secure a PPO that was denied because of the current Michigan law.

Her second disappointment came when her case was dismissed, after which she became despondent and distant. Phone calls were not returned and she discontinued counseling. Our center was heart broken to hear the news that she had taken her life, one that was so very short and young. The question in my mind remains, if the PPO had been granted would she be alive today. Would she have had that glimmer of hope, that sense of power and control, that one small thing that initiates healing?

I ask the committee to consider the fact that changing one law can give such strength and healing to individuals.

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